



# Community Eligibility Provision (CEP)

CEP is a federal reimbursement option that allows high-poverty schools and districts to provide breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students. Schools do not process school meal applications, track meals by fee category (i.e., free, reduced-price, paid) or collect fees; they simply count the total number of meals served.

## Eligibility

Any school district, group of schools in a district, or individual school with 25 percent\* or more “identified students”—children eligible for free school meals who are identified by means other than an individual household application—can participate.

Identified students include:

- Children who are directly certified for free school meals because their household participates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), and in certain instances, Medicaid.
- Children who are certified for free school meals without an application because they are experiencing homelessness, are considered a runaway, certified as migrant, in foster care, or enrolled in Head Start.

## Calculating Reimbursements

Under CEP, all meals are served to students at no cost to them. Meals are still reimbursed by the USDA and state agencies, but CEP schools use a more streamlined approach to counting and claiming.

The enacted FY2024 State Budget included an additional \$134.6M to expand access to free school meals through the new CEP State Subsidy.

The CEP State Subsidy ensures all CEP meals are reimbursed at the free rate using a combination of federal and state reimbursements. In order to receive this funding, schools must be enrolled in CEP.

Learn more, find additional resources, and watch recorded webinars at [bit.ly/NY-CEP](https://bit.ly/NY-CEP)

Households with students attending CEP schools were nearly

**3x** less likely to be food insecure

than households with students attending a school eligible for, but not participating in CEP.

## CEP Benefits Students and Schools:

- Reduces the administrative burden—schools no longer collect fees or verify school meal applications
- Eliminates the stigma—ending the perception that school breakfast and lunch are just for “poor kids”
- Boosts participation—allowing more kids to experience the educational and health benefits linked to eating school meals
- Simplifies counting and claiming—optimizing the impact of offering Breakfast After the Bell
- Eliminates unpaid school meal debt—schools no longer have to foot the bill for unpaid meal fees or try to collect them from families

\*Note: The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) amended CEP regulations by lowering the minimum identified student percentage (ISP) from 40 percent to 25 percent, effective October 26, 2023.

## Increasing the ISP

Two key strategies effectively increase ISPs:

### Implement Strong Direct Certification Practices

School districts should implement strong direct certification practices throughout the school year to increase the district's ISP. This helps districts accurately reflect poverty within the school and improves a school's chances of qualifying for CEP. Learn more about direct certification best practices from our [tip sheet](#). (available at [HungerSolutionsNY.org/CEP](https://HungerSolutionsNY.org/CEP))

### Connect Families to SNAP

Increasing the number of eligible families participating in SNAP increases schools' ISPs, thereby better positioning schools to adopt and sustain CEP. As trusted messengers, schools can use our SNAP Outreach Toolkit to spread the word to families.

## Applying for CEP

Eligible school districts must declare their intent to implement CEP in a school or group of schools for the upcoming school year by June 30. This requires applying to the New York State Education Department, Child Nutrition Program Administration.

Eligibility is based on the ISP calculated using April 1 enrollment and the current school year's direct certification data.

The application and instructions can be found at: [cn.nysed.gov/content/CEP](https://cn.nysed.gov/content/CEP)

## We Can Help

Hunger Solutions New York works with schools, government leaders, and organizations to expand the implementation of CEP. We work one-on-one with districts to:

- Help administrators understand CEP eligibility and the application process;
- Provide strategies to improve local direct certification processes to maximize CEP reimbursement;
- Explain CEP implementation and reimbursement;
- Connect schools considering CEP implementation with CEP schools with similar demographics, helping administrators better understand CEP finances;
- Connect schools with community partners and programs to maximize the impact of CEP.

For more information, visit [HungerSolutionsNY.org/CEP](https://HungerSolutionsNY.org/CEP) or contact Francesca DiGiorgio at [Francesca.DiGiorgio@HungerSolutionsNY.org](mailto:Francesca.DiGiorgio@HungerSolutionsNY.org)

### Our SNAP Outreach Toolkit for Schools



Sample language, graphics, and communication tools to help schools connect families to SNAP. →

